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American Merchants and the Chinese Coolie Trade 1850-1880:
Contrasting models of human trafficking to Peru and the United States

The involvement of American merchants in the Chinese coolie trade which was at its height from 1850 to 1880 was inextricably linked to both the Peruvian guano trade and the growing demand for cheap labor in the United States. The discovery by English merchants of significant deposits of guano on the Chincha islands off of the coast of Peru in the early 1820's began a period of immense wealth as merchants realized the potential use of guano as fertilizer for European farmers.

Guano had long been known as a valuable fertilizer by many Andean farmers but its discovery by British merchants and farmers provided a market for this resource. By 1842 the Peruvian government became aware of the revenue potential presented by guano and took control of the resource. In 1849, "contracts for loading the guano were awarded by the Peruvian government, sequentially, to two Peruvians, Domingo Elias and Andres Alvarez Calderon and the exporters' responsibility was with the chartering of vessels to pick up guano at the islands."¹ Native peasants were the first source of involuntary labor used in the mining and loading of guano at the Chinch islands. "The first guano contractors entrapped peasants from certain

¹ W. M. Mathew, *The house of Gibbs and the Peruvian guano monopoly*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), 116.

Andean regions as cheap labor to mine the deposits. Ammonia fumes, released from the guano during excavation, shriveled the skin of these unfortunate men and blinded some of them.”²

In the late 1840’s the mining and loading of guano was done by a mix of slave, convict, indentured and free labor. The conditions continued to be deplorable and many contemporary observers were appalled by the way laborers were treated on the guano islands.

European demand for guano began to exceed the supply of mined guano due in large part to the hazardous conditions that the captive laborers faced and the inefficient system that was used in the loading of the guano. “Delays could be in the order of two to three months. As many as 100 vessels were waiting at the north island when a British naval officer went there in 1853.”³ In an effort to boost the supply of available laborers for the mining of guano, the Peruvian government passed a law allowing for the importing of Chinese coolies. “The fate of these Chinese coolie laborers was to be even worse than the local laborers they had been brought in to replace, most dying from inhuman working conditions and torture.”⁴ When the Peruvian government banned slavery in 1854 a shortage of cheap labor resulted. Since a free slave labor force no longer existed in Peru the guano contract holders looked to the increased importation of coolies from China as a solution to the labor crisis.

Many of the Chinese exported from China during the 1850’s and 1860’s were either tricked into signing contracts to be coolie laborers or kidnapped and forced into the coolie trade against their will. Once aboard the merchant ships most were destined to labor as slave replacements on the guano islands of Peru or in the southern United States. The rise in the Chinese coolie labor trade of the 1850’s-1880’s was inextricably linked to the increasing demand

² David Hollett, *More precious than gold: the story of the Peruvian guano trade*. (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 76.

³ W. M. Mathew, *The house of Gibbs*, 117.

⁴ Hollett, *More precious than gold*, 76.

for cheap labor which developed in the wake of anti-slavery legislation in Peru⁵ and later in the United States⁶. With newly established U.S. trade relations with China, U.S. merchants were able to access one of the largest pools of labor on the planet.

Already involved in the transportation of Peruvian guano, many U.S. merchants took advantage of the ability to make additional money by transporting Chinese coolies to the New World. In this way they could make a substantial profit both in importing labor and then exporting guano. During the 1850's American merchant ships were heavily involved in transporting Chinese coolie laborers from China to the Peruvian Port of Callao and by the 1860's to the United States.

Once the Chinese coolies arrived at the port of Callao they were sent to work the agricultural areas of the Altiplano or to the Chincha islands to mine and load guano for shipping to European markets. The importation of coolie laborer was crucial to the success of the Peruvian guano trade. They were also central to the development of the western U.S. as they worked in the gold mines of California, in building the railroad system to connect the eastern and western U.S. and later as laborers, merchants and artisans in the more urban areas of the U.S. west.

The discovery in the late 1840's of gold in California "attracted the voluntary immigration of many Chinese that had been driven from China by land shortages, overpopulation, famines, natural disasters, and the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-1864."⁷ As Chinese laborers immigrated to California they began to compete with local white labor force and raised the concerns of California officials. By 1852, even before the larger movement

⁵ The Peruvian government passed legislation banning slavery in 1854.

⁶ The United States Congress passed the thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution banning slavery in 1865.

⁷ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 156.

began, the governor of California advised that Chinese coolie immigration be restricted, and in 1855 the State legislature enacted a law imposing a head tax of \$55 on every immigrant of that race. This was followed in 1858 by a law forbidding Chinese or Mongolians to enter the State, and later by other restrictive enactments, but all such legislation was declared unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court, and in 1876 by the Supreme Court of the United States.⁸ The Chinese immigrants faced physical attacks, social restrictions, unfair taxation and a greatly diminished legal standing which prevented most from bringing any legal challenges to injustices they faced.

Within the common American narrative of this period little attention has been paid to the importance of Chinese laborers to both Peru and the United States. Many historians have also failed to adequately examine the conditions they faced both during their dangerous journey across the Pacific and upon reaching the New World. Without the substantial labor force that they supplied, the Peruvian guano trade would have been substantially less profitable and the construction of U.S. railroads would have been nearly impossible to complete with the higher cost minimal labor force that existed in the western U.S.

Initially the Chinese were welcomed with open arms by capitalists that saw coolie laborers as a profitable low cost alternative to white labor. However, as they began to compete with white laborers for employment, the white population began to see the imported Chinese laborers as a threat. The violence and discrimination that followed greatly altered the situation for Chinese immigrants to the United States. The coolies that immigrated to Peru faced similar rejection from the Peruvian laborer's whom also saw them as direct competition in the labor force.

⁸ R. D. McKenzie, *Oriental Exclusion: The effect of American immigration laws, regulations, and Judicial decisions upon the Chinese and Japanese on the American Pacific Coast*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1928. 10.

The immigration of Chinese to Peru and the United States was significantly different than the immigration of other peoples in the late 1800's. "Emigrants from China were bought and sold like merchandise."⁹ Prior to being transported they underwent physical inspections similar to those endured by African slaves and upon entry at their destination were examined in much the same way. The treatment of Chinese coolies also differed between the legal and illegal trade. The legal trade offered inspections to insure that the vessels were not overloaded and sufficient supplies were carried to support the coolies on the long sea voyage. This was not the case with those forced into the illegal coolie trade as they forced substantially difficult conditions on the overloaded merchant ships.

Many were forced by circumstances in China or by merchants seeking wealth, to risk their lives in a journey across the Pacific Ocean. Most knew nothing about what they would be required to endure on the journey or if they survived, upon arrival in the New World. Even the terms of their labor contracts, for those coolies that were transported legally found that once their contracts were purchased there was little chance that the terms would be honored by the new contract holder. Additionally there were substantial differences between the way coolies destined to the U.S. and those destined for work in the Peruvian guano islands were recorded in the U.S. consulate dispatches which covered the majority of the coolie trade.

In order to better understand the both voluntary and involuntary immigration of Chinese coolies to the New World it is important to examine the role of the Peruvian guano trade and the anti-slavery legislation which created a shortage of cheap labor. Historian W.M. Mathew did extensive research in the 1960's and 1970's on the Peruvian guano trade. He examined the role of the Peruvian government, the revenues and loans they received from guano contracts, the use of slave labor, and later, the use of coolie labor to mine guano in an attempt to understand why

⁹ David H. Bailey, U.S. Consul, Dispatches From US Consuls in Hong Kong, April 25, 1871. 1.

this trade did not produce a lasting boost to the Peruvian economy. His journal articles, written in the 1970's, address the role of foreign contractors, the British market for guano, the problems that existed with the export sector of the Peruvian Government and its use of largely imported labor to mine guano. However, his examination of the coolie labor largely focused on the Chinese coolies after they reached Peru.

In 1981 he published a book which examines the role of the London merchant house of Antony Gibbs & Sons in the export of guano from Peru to Britain. His book length analysis relies on the papers of the Gibbs Company and letters by European merchants and government officials. Mathew's analysis focuses on the relationship between British merchants like Antony Gibbs and the Peruvian government in the contracting, mining and exporting of guano. His focus on Gibbs as the central figure of guano merchant trade is made obvious in his book *The House of Gibbs and the Peruvian Monopoly*¹⁰ which focuses on the London merchant house of Antony Gibbs & Sons. His purpose is to "offer a rigorous analysis of the way in which Gibbs handled the trade and of the nature and implications of their relationship with the Peruvian government, the owner of the guano."¹¹

In one article which appeared in the 1972 *Hispanic American Historical Review*¹² he examines the way that the Peruvian Government accepted and used monopoly contracts as a way to control the guano prices and how this influenced the future demise of the trade. He focuses primarily on the defective nature of the arrangements, the Peruvian government's need for increased borrowing to fund war with Bolivia and the mismanagement of funds and debt obligations which were determined based on projected profits from the sale of guano. These

¹⁰ W. M. Mathew, *The house of Gibbs*, .

¹¹ W. M. Mathew, *The house of Gibbs*, ix.

¹² W. M. Mathew, "Foreign Contractors and the Peruvian Government at the Outset of the Guano Trade." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 52, No. 4, Nov., 1972: 598-620.

three issues according to Mathew brought about the premature demise of the guano trade in Peru. The lack of lasting economic prosperity is linked with the way that the Peruvian government proceeded in taking over the guano supply and instituting a series of guano contract monopolies in order to facilitate the removal of guano at the lowest government expense to maximize profits.

However, he failed to address the true importance of the imported Chinese coolies or the U.S. merchants that were responsible for importing the largest number of laborers to Peru. As the primary labor force responsible for mining guano, Chinese coolies were crucial to the success of the Peruvian guano trade. Mathew also fails to provide much insight into the plight of the Chinese as they labored to meet the European demand for guano.

Much like Mathew, Paul Gootenberg¹³ points to the Peruvian government's mismanagement of guano revenues and the system of receiving the majority of revenues in the form of new loans or the refinancing of older existing loans instead of direct funds as the primary reason that Peru failed to see any significant lasting national effects of the guano trade. He notes that "early guano revenues were channeled almost exclusively into military projects...the two fortunate and fundamental accidents in the process were that guano, which required few local inputs (simply birds, shovels, and conscript labor), was an island export uniquely amenable to rapid development during protracted instability and that it fell into the lap of the Lima state."¹⁴

Gootenberg addresses the economic aspects of what he calls "Peru's Fictitious Prosperity," which he concludes was due in part by the governments lack of investment in infrastructure and their increasing reliance on foreign loans instead of increased revenues. He also argues that the extraction of Peru's guano resources was inefficient in that a great deal of the guano was lost transferring it to the ships. On some islands the guano was shoveled down long

¹³ Paul Gootenberg, *Between silver and guano: commercial policy and the state in post-independence Peru*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

¹⁴ Gootenberg, *Between Silver and guano*, 80.

canvas shoots to the ships waiting below. Over time the canvas tended to become riddled with tears and as a result, much of the guano would not make into the ships hold and would end up coating the ocean and the ship. He further argues that the wealth that was created went largely to pad the pockets of the State assigned contractors and the wealthy elite. Very little of the guano revenue went into the Peruvian economy as imports were freely welcomed into the country with little or no duties charged.

Gootenberg concludes by arguing that Peruvian nationalism played a significant role in shaping the radical liberalism and monopolies that the government utilized in managing the guano trade of post independence Peru. He argues that this system of government embraced monopolies over guano extraction and that it had “emerged directly from the previous political economy of Peru’s overlooked nationalist era.”¹⁵ However, Gootenberg’s analysis largely overlooks the significance of Chinese laborers in mining the guano. Without their work the Peruvian guano trade would not have been possible after the Peruvian government banned slavery. Gootenberg also does little to examine the conditions that Chinese coolies endured both on their journey from China and in the guano islands.

These authors and others have focused primarily on the inefficiencies of the Peruvian system of extraction or the squandered opportunity to institute lasting economic change with the wealth that the guano trade created. Although a significant amount of wealth was made by the sale of guano contracts by the government, that wealth did not improve the overall long-term situation of the Peruvian economy and led to the deaths of many Chinese coolies in Peru. The conditions that the imported coolies faced in the United States were not much better. Almost as soon as they began to arrive in large numbers, they faced significant discrimination and violence.

¹⁵ Gootenberg, *Between Silver and guano*, 132.

Historians that have examined the anti-Chinese sentiment in the western United States leading up to national anti-Chinese legislation in the late 1870's and 1880's tend to focus on the social and cultural conditions that Chinese immigrants faced. The discrimination and violence Chinese immigrants faced impacted their ability to work and live. In her article *American Labour and Chinese Immigration*, Isabella Black examines the treatment of Chinese immigrant laborers by their American employers and the American public. She argues that once the need for Chinese labor began to decline with the completion of railroads, they were forced to the bottom of society. One way this was accomplished was through the 1872 national Chinese exclusion policy, other local laws, taxes based on race and with violence.

In an article from the *Law & Social Inquiry* journal Kitty Calavita explores the dilemmas and contradictions associated with the enforcement of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. She argues "that the difficulties encountered by enforcement personnel, and the sometimes chaotic and inconsistent nature of enforcement, were related to paradoxes, and the techniques employed by inspectors to deal with them, ironically facilitated aspiring immigrants' resistance to the full force of the law." To support her argument Calavita utilizes congressional documents, as well as unpublished letters and memoranda from immigration officials. She also suggests that by focusing on the everyday dilemmas faced by the officials implementing the law we may be able to learn more about the law and "its indeterminacy than the heavily scrutinized landmark cases that constitute much of the literature" from this period.¹⁶ The impact of exclusion legislation and taxation is also addressed by Mark Kanazawa as he examines how these influenced the lives of Chinese employed in California Gold mining.

¹⁶ Kitty Calavita, "The Paradoxes of Race, Class, Identity, and "Passing": Enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Acts, 1882-1910." In *Law & Social Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter, 2000). 1

Kanazawa, in his article *Immigration, Exclusion and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California*, examines early state attempts at Chinese exclusion following the first major increase in Chinese immigration during the California Gold Rush. Kanazawa addresses the dilemma that state officials faced in attempting to exclude Chinese from society while still attempting to collect taxes on them. He argues that “one explanation for early opposition to exclusion in California, largely overlooked in existing scholarship, lies in the fact that the state levied taxes on foreign miners, which provided both the state and counties with mixed incentives to exclude Chinese miners.”¹⁷ In this way the state and local governments were collecting revenue on one hand but having to deal with increasing agitation amongst the white community that believed Chinese immigrants posed a threat to livelihoods of white workers. States began to view Chinese laborers as both a threat to the livelihoods of white workers but also as a necessity because of they could obtain higher taxes from Chinese laborers. The introduction Federal anti-Chinese legislation further burdened Chinese American immigrants.

The issues that anti-Chinese legislation posed for the Chinese communities of the West are examined in articles by Richard Cole and Gabriel Chin, as well as John Wunder whom has written a number of scholarly journal articles on this topic. Richard Cole and Gabriel Chin’s collaborative article which appeared in the 1999 *Law and History Review*, connects the anti-Chinese hostility of the late 1800’s to their experiences with the American legal system. This system became increasingly influenced by cultural beliefs and fears about the increase in Chinese immigrant labor. The result was that Chinese immigrants increasingly became the targets of personal violence and faced legal discrimination because of laws which were passed

¹⁷ Mark Kanazawa, “Immigration, Exclusion and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California,” in *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 65 No. 3 (Sep. 2005), 781.

with the intent of making their lives burdensome forcing them to continue providing remedial labor.

In a 1983 article which appeared in the *Pacific Historical Review*, John Wunder examined the prospect that Chinese individuals were denied justice when charged with a crime in the Pacific Northwest. He also provides background on the conditions that led them to leave China for the prospects they believed, awaited them in the Western United States. In another article Wunder also examines the changing legal situation for Chinese in Montana where, after the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, courts began to “reflect popular attitudes toward the Chinese.”¹⁸

In order to understand why Chinese immigrants faced so much violence and discrimination in the United States during the late 1800's it is important to examine the factors that influenced their immigration. In his analysis of this topic, Carlos Schwantes addresses some of the cultural situations that existed in China which pushed many Chinese laborers to immigrate to North America in response to the California Gold Rush and the need for railroad labor. “Among early Asian residents of the Pacific Northwest, the Chinese were by far the most numerous. They had been driven from China by land shortages, overpopulation, famines, natural disasters, and the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-1864.”¹⁹

These immigrants fled dangerous situations in China only to encounter new dangers in the United States. “The region's Chinese reflected many different backgrounds, but to most whites they remained only objects of prejudice, violence, and various special taxes and property-

¹⁸ John Wunder, “Law and Chinese in Frontier Montana,” *The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 30 No. 3 (Summer, 1980), 18.

¹⁹ Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 156.

holding restrictions.”²⁰ Beginning in the gold mines and moving to the building of the railroads and ending up in the cities where they tended to take over the laundry businesses.

Schwantes argues that trouble began on the railroads, “when white workers feared that the importation of a potentially unlimited supply of cheap labor threatened their jobs. When hard times hit the Pacific Northwest in the mid-1880’s, unemployed white workers participated in several crusades to drive the Chinese from the region. The agitation led to anti-Chinese violence in Tacoma and Seattle, martial law, and dispatching of federal troops to quell the disorder.”²¹ The context in which anti-Chinese actions were taken and the impact that this had both on the Chinese communities and the more broad history of the Western U.S. is also examined by Richard White.

In his book *“It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,” A New History of The American West*, Richard White examines the involvement of Chinese immigrants as they pertained to the history of the American West. As he examines the labor system which existed for Chinese immigrants, Richard White argues that whites believed that “nonwhite workers were suited for agricultural stoop labor because of their small size, tolerance for heat, stoicism, minimal wants. And lack of ambition. Conversely, whites argued that minorities lacked the qualities ambition, skill, and intelligence—necessary for better jobs.”²² White argues that “the Chinese aroused such deep racial hatred in the nineteenth-century west precisely because they seemed to be a threat to the economic success of white migrants.”²³

He goes on to say that “Next to the Indians, the Chinese probably were the victims of the most direct racial violence. But whereas California Indians faced organized violence that

²⁰ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 156.

²¹ Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest*, 157.

²² Richard White, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,” A New History of The American West*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 282.

²³ White, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 321-322.

compelled them to labor, the Chinese faced violence that sought to prevent them from laboring. As the Chinese moved into new areas of urban labor, however, they began to seem a real threat in occupations white workers expected to control.”²⁴ One such area was in the laundry business which many white women believed was one of the few areas aside from prostitution where they could make a living. Any skilled labor was believed by white workers to be their domain and the intrusion of Chinese laborers was unacceptable. “Whites asserted that the Chinese, because of their racial makeup, could never share the values or ambitions of white workers. They were, the theory went, a lesser people content with a lesser wage, and if they were not content to remain in menial jobs unwanted by whites. Then they had to be banned.”²⁵

Chinese faced increased taxation and social legislation all aimed at forcing them down and out of the social hierarchy of the predominately white communities in the West. Gender also played a significant role in the anti-Chinese movement in the west as Chinese laborers began to take over even traditionally female jobs in laundry, women became involved in the anti-Chinese movement. The steps taken to limit Chinese immigration following the decline in the need for railroad labor around 1870 are addressed in three documents included in the book *Major Problems in the History of the American West*, edited by Clyde Milner II, Anne Butler and David Lewis. Also included in this book is an essay by Margaret K. Holden in which she examines the relationship between gender, protest and the anti-Chinese movement in Portland.

Holden argues that “many of Portland’s working women were among those breaking into public life, participating in anti-Chinese demonstrations at the city’s largest public meeting grounds, and even attending bonfire-lit, open-air rallies. Perceiving Chinese labor as an economic threat, they joined anti-Chinese leagues and even the Knights of Labor, calling for

²⁴ White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 340-341.

²⁵ White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, 342.

equal rights for white men and women at the expense of the Chinese.”²⁶ The influx of Chinese laborers into urban areas like Portland was the result of the 1884 depression which weakened the economy in the Pacific Northwest. This was compounded by the thousands of Chinese workers were let go with the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883. Many of whom migrated to Portland in search of work. But as Holden argues, they “found fierce competition for jobs and by 1890 Chinese men usually found employment as domestic servants, washing laundry or in common labor.”²⁷ Women that had traditionally filled these roles now found themselves competing with Chinese laborers for their jobs.

Each of these historians address significant issues related to the importation of Chinese coolies into Peru as part of the guano trade or to the United States and the anti-Chinese legislation that followed their arrival. However, they fail to provide an examination of the impact of the coolie trade on the coolies and their importance in the social and economic evolution of the American west and Peru. The role of American merchants in importing this new labor force is also largely overlooked by these historians.

American merchants were equipped with faster clipper ships than their European counterparts and later with steam ships that routinely transported Chinese immigrants between Hong Kong and San Francisco. The shipping patterns and United States treaties with China, opened multiple Chinese ports to trade with the U.S. This provided American merchants with unprecedented access to a massive collective of cheap labor during a period in which slave labor was being banned in Peru and the U.S.

Merchant vessels traveled from port to port, trading goods from one area to another. Their involvement in transporting Chinese coolies was made possible by the opening of China to

²⁶ Margaret K. Holden, *Gender, Protest, and the Anti-Chinese Movement*, in “Major Problems in the History of the American West,” ed. By Clyde A. Milner II, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 295.

²⁷ Holden, *Gender, Protest and the Anti-Chinese Movement*, 296.

foreign trade. The port of Swatow, China was opened to the United States by the Treaty of Wanghia while Whampoa opened to foreign trade through a treaty with France, both in 1844.²⁸ All three of these ports are located in the Guangzhou region of China which served as a primary region of foreign trade in China during the 1800's. The influence of foreign traders increased in this region which was plagued by in-fighting and famine. These circumstances aided merchants in exporting Chinese coolies to Peru and the United States.

Legalization of foreign trade at Swatow was seen as a way to bring law-and-order into the port. The significance of the foreign merchants in the shipping of coolies is evident in an 1863 letter from C.W. Bradley Jr., the U.S. Consulate at the port of Swatow. In his letter, Bradley includes an article from the Daily Press which describes the problems in the region and the influence of foreign traders. "Anarchy and misery arose which have characterized Swatow since foreigners obtained a footing there. The people were absolutely eating one another for subsistence. The place became the very centre of the coolie traffic, simply because bitter starvation was the only alternative to immigration."²⁹

While some coolie laborers willingly immigrated to Peru for work, others were likely forced into coolie labor. The article goes on to say that "it necessarily came to pass that a coolie became an animal of some value, and consequently worth kidnapping. This circumstance materially added to the misery which prevailed."³⁰ Villagers turned on neighboring villages, conducting raids for the purpose of kidnapping victims to sell as coolies.

²⁸ "Treaty of Wanghia." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/635458/Treaty-of-Wanghia>>.

²⁹ United States. Dept. of State, *Commercial relations of the United States with foreign countries* United States Bureau of Foreign Commerce (1854-1903), (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1863). 628. http://books.google.com/books?id=nhJAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA628&dq=coolie+export+swatow+china&hl=en&ei=Qnp9TcGvFlbmsQPtvuyFAw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CE0Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=coolie%20export%20swatow%20china&f=false accessed March 13, 2011.

³⁰ Dept. of State, *Commercial relations*, 629.

United States involvement in this region of China opened it to exploitation by American merchant vessels, some of which were also involved in the guano trade. The privileged status that the U. S. gained through the 1844 treaty, gave American merchants the advantage in the coolie trade. They were a logical choice for transporting coolie laborers to Peru and to transport guano to Europe and the U.S. However, coolie laborers were but one type of cargo carried by American merchants as part of the global trade in Peruvian Guano. This is evident in examining the cargo manifests recorded by U.S. Consulate in Callao.

The availability of agricultural laborers declined with the beginning of guano mining and exports. "The first guano contractors entrapped peasants from certain Andean regions as cheap labor to mine the deposits. Ammonia fumes, released from the guano during excavation, shriveled the skin of these unfortunate men and blinded some of them. The fate of Chinese and Polynesian workers, later brought out to replace much local labor, was to be even worse...most dying from inhuman working conditions and torture."³¹

By the mid 1850's American merchants made up a substantial portion of the shipping fleet contracted "by the Houses of Barredo & Bro of New York, William Gibbs & Co. of London and Montane & Co. of Paris to transport guano. Of the about two hundred ships at the Chincha Islands in 1856, over fifty were American ships."³² However, these ships were not only involved in the transportation of guano from the islands. American merchant ships also transported cargo and labor to the port of Callao and the Chincha Islands.

In 1854, the Peruvian government had passed legislation banning slavery which created a significant shortage of cheap labor both in agriculture and guano. This is reflected in an 1856 dispatch from the U.S. Consul in Callao. "The country is suffering inconvenience owing to the

³¹ Hollett, *More precious than gold*, 76.

³² William Miles, *United States, Consulate (Callao, Peru) Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao, 1854-1906*. Reel 2, December 27, 1856.

liberation of the slaves which has increased the prices of labor and food and rendered them both scarce and costly.”³³ Chinese coolie laborers were seen by the U.S. Consulate as a labor force that could replace the slave labor force in both agriculture and guano. “In the present condition of Peru the coolie immigration is decidedly beneficial to the coolies themselves. The high rates of wages for labor and the scarcity of laboring population afford good advantages if provident, of providing for themselves comfortably.”³⁴ In many ways this dispatch seems to be attempting to sell U.S. involvement in the coolie trade as a good thing for the labor force void left by the liberation of slaves and for the coolies themselves. However, this take on the trade from the U.S. Consulate in Callao makes it a point to present an unrealistic perspective on the conditions that the coolie laborers faced both on the journey to Peru and their work when they arrived.

The massive influx of coolie laborers in the 1850’s largely replaced the native Andean workers and slaves that had been mining guano. “From January to March 1856 United States diplomatic dispatch records show five American ships carrying a total of 1,764 coolie laborers. During that same period of time 18,650 tons of guano was loaded on American ships leaving Peru through the United States Consular in Callao.”³⁵ At the Chincha Islands the merchants would drop off the coolie laborers and pick up guano.

The American ships *Winged Racer*, *Westward Ho!*, and *Dalmatia*, are all recorded as arriving in Callao carrying coolie laborers. The *Winged Racer* arrived from Swatow, China with a cargo of 736 males, *Westward Ho!*, carried 848 from Whampoa, China and the *Dalmatia* arrived in Callao with a cargo of 180 coolies from Amoy, China, all bound for the Chincha Islands. However, these were not the only American ships that carried coolies from China to

³³ William Miles, *United States, Consulate (Callao, Peru) Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao, 1854-1906*. Reel 2, September 30, 1856. 1.

³⁴ William Miles, *Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao, September 30, 1856*. 3.

³⁵ William Miles, *United States, Consulate (Callao, Peru) Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao, 1854-1906*. Reel 2, March 30, 1856.

List of Vessels employed in the conveyance of United States passengers from China to California.

Date	Ship	Name	Master	Belonging to	Agent	From	To	Passengers
1855	24	Ship Commodore	Dr. H. Williams	Boston	Geo. B. Thompson			
1855	25	Ship Eagle	H. W. Townsend		G. Caldwell	San Francisco	1854	1855
1855	26					San Francisco	1855	1856
1855	27	Ship Commodore	Dr. H. Williams	Boston	Geo. B. Thompson			
1855	28	Ship Eagle	H. W. Townsend		G. Caldwell	San Francisco	1855	1856
1855	29					San Francisco	1856	1857
1855	30	Ship Commodore	Dr. H. Williams	Boston	Geo. B. Thompson			
1855	31	Ship Eagle	H. W. Townsend		G. Caldwell	San Francisco	1856	1857
1855	32					San Francisco	1857	1858

United States Consulate
 San Francisco / New York
 William Miller
 U.S. Consul.

On their return from the islands the ships *Winged Racer* and *Westward Ho!*, are recorded carrying a combined cargo of some 2950 tons of guano with an estimated value of \$35,400.³⁷ According to the U.S. Consulate dispatches from Callao, in December 31, 1857 the value of guano shipments were determined by adding 25 percent to the ships loaded tonnage and were valued at \$12 per ton.³⁸ By 1858, 33 1/3 percent was being added to the loaded tonnage and the shipments were valued at \$30 per ton.³⁹ This was a significant amount of money and does not include the value of the coolie contracts which averaged almost \$40 per coolie in profit for the merchants.

³⁹ William Miles, *United States, Consulate (Callao, Peru) Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao, 1854-1906*. Reel 3, June 30, 1858.

American merchants involved in the legal trade of voluntary coolie laborers from China received significant profits from their transportation to the New World. "One American ship, capable of transporting 1,200 passengers and making two trips to China a year, could net nearly \$96,000. In the single year of 1852...American ships netted more than one and one-half million dollars transporting coolies from China."⁴⁰ For those American merchants that were involved in the illegal kidnapping and transportation of coolies to Peru, Cuba, or the United States profits were substantially increased. "An American shipper dealing in illegal coolies could expect to net from \$20,000 to \$50,000 and more for a single voyage."⁴¹ The American merchant ships also profited greatly from the transportation of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. as well.

The Port of Hong Kong was better policed than some of the smaller ports like Swatow and Amoy, requiring merchants that transported Chinese immigrants to more closely follow the immigration rules and restrictions of China and the U.S. However, this did not deter merchants from transporting large numbers of Chinese to the Pacific coast of the United States. An April 11, 1851 dispatch from the U.S. Consulate R.R. Bush describes the transportation of Chinese immigrants to San Francisco.

Bush calls the Departments attention to the "large Chinese immigration to California taking place at this time. Since the commencement of the present year upwards of twelve hundred Chinese have embarked at this port for San Francisco, many of them taking cargo and produce of China and at this time several large vessels among them the American ships *Oneco* and *Lebanon* are loading with Chinese passengers and freight."⁴² He then proceeds to describe the nature of the passengers which provides a stark contrast to the coolie laborers sent to the

⁴⁰ James Henry Upton III, *American Involvement in the Chinese Coolie Trade 1848-1882*, Thesis (M.A.)—Auburn University, 1970. 18.

⁴¹ Upton III, *American Involvement in the Chinese Coolie Trade*, 18.

⁴² R.R. Bush, United States Department of State Dispatches from U.S. Consuls in Hong Kong, April 11, 1851. 1.

Peruvian guano islands and the Southern United States. "The emigrants are of different classes, merchants, small tradesmen, agriculturists, and artisans, all of them are respectable people, and without doubt the immigration will increase largely if the people now going are successful in their pursuits."⁴³

Consular Return of American Vessels at the Port of Hong Kong for the Half Year ending June 30 th 1851											
N ^o 33											
Date of Arrival	Class	Name	Builder	Master	Where from	Where bound	Where landed	Cargo on board	Cargo on shore	Date of Departure	Where to
28 th Aug	Steam	Oneco	152 ft	Whitmore	San Francisco	Batavia		Ballast	Ballast	April 2 nd	Singapore
29 th	Ship	Sarah Boyd	242 ft	Carlson	Do	Batavia		Do	Do	29 th	Amoy
31 st Aug	Ship	Andalusia	771 ft	Carlson	Do	Batavia		Do	Do	May 4 th	San Francisco
April 3	"	Leabanon	196 ft	Drew	Do	New York		Do	Do		
Date of Arrival	Class	Name	Builder	Master	Where from	Where bound	Where landed	Cargo on board	Cargo on shore	Date of Departure	Where to
April 1	Ship	Oneco	152 ft	J. Lee	Manila	Dredburg		Sundries	Sundries	April 8 th	San Francisco
6 th	"	Wahida	679 ft	Reaney	Shanghai	New York		do	do	April 15 th	Batavia
11 th	"	Yildiz	112 ft	Smith	San Francisco	Philadelphia		Ballast		11 th	San Francisco

Both the *Leabanon* and *Oneco* are listed as carrying Chinese passengers not coolie laborers which is how they were listed in some of the smaller ports. The safeguards that were taken in the legal transportation of two-hundred Chinese passengers to the U.S. are recounted in a February 9, 1870 dispatch from the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong.

These people [Chinese coolies] are sent by the Arkansas River Valley Immigration Company, to be employed at plantation or farm work in the valley of the Arkansas river. They have been subjected by me to a very severe and rigid examination as to their knowledge of the Country they were going to, the wages they were to receive and the length of time they expected to remain. Each individual was personally examined by the Colonial Surgeon as to his health and fitness to undertake the voyage: The provisions were carefully inspected by the Harbor Master, in fact all the requirements of the local

⁴³ Bush, Dispatches from U.S. Consuls in Hong Kong, April 11, 1851. 1.

⁴⁴ Bush, Dispatches from U.S. Consuls in Hong Kong, July 1, 1851. 1-2.

authorities were fully complied with. They left this port 'free and voluntary emigrants,' and were not only willing but anxious to go.⁴⁵

These policies were instituted in response to the horrors of the illegal coolie trade, common in ports like Macao and Swatow China. The majority of the illegal Chinese coolie trade was done from the smaller and more remote ports in Swatow and Macao due largely to the lack of government supervision and enforcement of the anti-slavery laws relating to transporting coolies.

A large number of the Chinese transported from these ports had been kidnapped and were forced to sign labor contracts without knowing where they would be sent or what they would be asked to do or what if any compensation they would receive. Others were tricked into arriving at the baracoons which were the large warehouse buildings where shipments of Chinese coolies were kept prior to export. Once there, most were unable to escape forced immigration to the United States, Cuba and Peru as contracted coolie laborers.

By late 1850's the consular officials in China began to report on the dire situation of imported coolies coolie trade in Macao was declared to be a slave trade by the U.S. Department of State's Judicial Division. The ships that were involved in the transporting of Chinese coolies from Macao were declared to be engaged in piracy.⁴⁶ This did little to slow the overall coolie trade due in large part to the power that the Macao coolie dealers had over the coolie trade.

In a May 1871 dispatch from the consul in Hong Kong, David H. Bailey describes the plan by a "Mr. Payne to import one-hundred thousand Chinese laborers into Louisiana, and other Southern States. Bailey then notes that the Barracoons at Macao propose to furnish a part of this quota...as he can procure these laborers only through the Coolie dealers. They control the entire

⁴⁵ David H. Bailey, United States Department of State Dispatches from U.S. Consuls in Hong Kong, February 9, 1870. 1-2.

⁴⁶ Bailey, Dispatches From US Consuls in Hong Kong, April 7, 1871. 1.

trade, and it is full of rascality and brutality here, as well as elsewhere.”⁴⁷ Bailey also included a translation of the Chinese version of a flyer that was made to recruit those Chinese laborers to work in Louisiana. It describes very good terms for those employed in this manner for either five or seven years at the end of which the laborer would receive \$150 to \$200 in addition to their monthly salary of \$7. Additionally, the document states that those that agreed to go to Louisiana would enter the United States at San Francisco and travel six days by rail to reach their destination. Once in Louisiana they would be employed in the production of sugar cane, cotton, rice and corn, many of which are also grown in China.⁴⁸ The unfortunate reality for many Chinese that answered this call is that once in the U.S., the terms of the contract they signed would not be upheld by many of the capitalists to which they were sold.

Even when the trade was well policed by the consular officials in China and rules to help protect the imported laborers were taken for their journey to the New World, the dangers for them did not end. The Chinese coolies were bought by the “rich traders, to serve the purchaser, at low wages for a service of years, in a foreign country, under contract, for the faithful performance of which, in many instances, he gives a mortgage on his wife and children; with a stipulation that at the end of his term of service he is to be brought back to China by his purchaser.”⁴⁹ These contracts were carried on to the United States and sold by agents of the dealer for a significant profit. However, for the Chinese coolies these contracts would no doubt, be null and void in the United States. “But never the less the coolie will comply strictly with all its terms...and this he will do because his purchaser holds his household loves in the land to

⁴⁷ Bailey, Dispatches From US Consuls in Hong Kong, May 6, 1871. 1-2.

⁴⁸ Bailey, Dispatches From US Consuls in Hong Kong, May 6, 1871. 4.

⁴⁹ Bailey, Dispatches From US Consuls in Hong Kong, April 25, 1871. 2-3.

which he always hopes and expects to return in pledge for the faithful performance of his bonds.”⁵⁰

The increased profits of the illegal coolie trade influenced merchants to take on additional coolies to account for the loss of those that would likely die during the long sea voyage. This resulted in an even greater loss of life as well as multiple cases where the coolies fought to escape and take over the ship. These revolts were usually in response to inhumane treatment and an obvious fear. Many did not understand where they were going and once, trapped below deck, many began to fall ill and die. Fearing that they would share this fate, some coolies chose to fight back while others committed suicide rather than face the same fate.⁵¹

American vessels are frequently taking Chinese coolies from this or the adjacent Chinese ports within the jurisdiction of this Consulate to Cuba, and ports in the South America or other foreign States... little or no regard is paid to the wholesome regulations which are provided by the law of Congress to restrict the number and provide for the comfort of passengers that each vessel shall carry to any port in the United States. The consequence is that these vessels are often overloaded,—greatly to the detriment of the lives and health of the passengers—being little better in their operation, it is feared, than the African slave trade.⁵²

There were many recorded instances where coolies fought back and attempted to regain their freedom while on the transport ships. The October 1855 uprising of Chinese coolies in response to their treatment by the crew of the American clipper ship *Waverly* is recounted in the June 1, 1856 dispatch from the U.S. Consul in Amoy, T.H. Hyatt. Hyatt provided abstracts from the ships log book which he obtained upon its arrival back in Amoy. In all some three hundred lives were lost as a result of the uprising and actions of the captain and crew of the *Waverly*. From the 29th of September to the 8th of October 1855, the captain of the *Waverly* took on 450 coolies in the ports of Amoy and Swatow.

⁵⁰ Bailey, Dispatches From US Consuls in Hong Kong, April 25, 1871. 3.

⁵¹ Upton III, *American Involvement in the Chinese Coolie Trade*, 19.

⁵² T.H. Hyatt, United States Department of State Dispatches from U.S. Consuls in Amoy, May 7, 1855. 2.

The log entry of October 11th states that one coolie escaped in the night and was thought to have swum to shore while the ship was still in the harbor of Swatow. Two others jumped overboard but drowned and eight more were reported as being very sick. The Waverly departed the following day bound for the Peruvian port of Callao. "On the night of the 15th, two [of the sick coolies] sprang overboard and drowned. The captain of the Waverly fell sick and also died on the 15th."⁵³ This marked a turning point in the fate of the coolies and crew. By the 18th many of the coolies had fallen sick and by the 24th of October some of the sick coolies had begun to die causing others to try and force their way on deck away from the increasing scourge but were pushed back by the crew.

After nearly a month at sea "the cooks of the Waverly were refusing to cook without receiving their monthly wages, depriving the coolies of food and sending them into a panic. By the afternoon of October 27th the coolies had broken through the aft hatch and some had got hold of the provisions."⁵⁴ Each time the coolies had fought to get out of the hold some had been shot and killed by the crew forcing the remaining coolies back below deck.

The log report of October 28th is the most gruesome as the first mate recounted the sight as he opened the hatches to allow the coolies on deck. "Took off the hatches to let the coolies come on deck again—got some lanterns and I went down myself to get them up—but to my greatest astonishment found that they had murdered one another...It was an awful sight to look at; some were hanging by the neck; some were shoved down into the tanks; some had their throats cut and the greatest part were stabbed to death."⁵⁵ While this log entry presents that the coolies murdered each other it is just as likely that they committed suicide rather than face

⁵³ Hyatt, Dispatches from U.S. consuls in Amoy, June 1st 1856. 1.

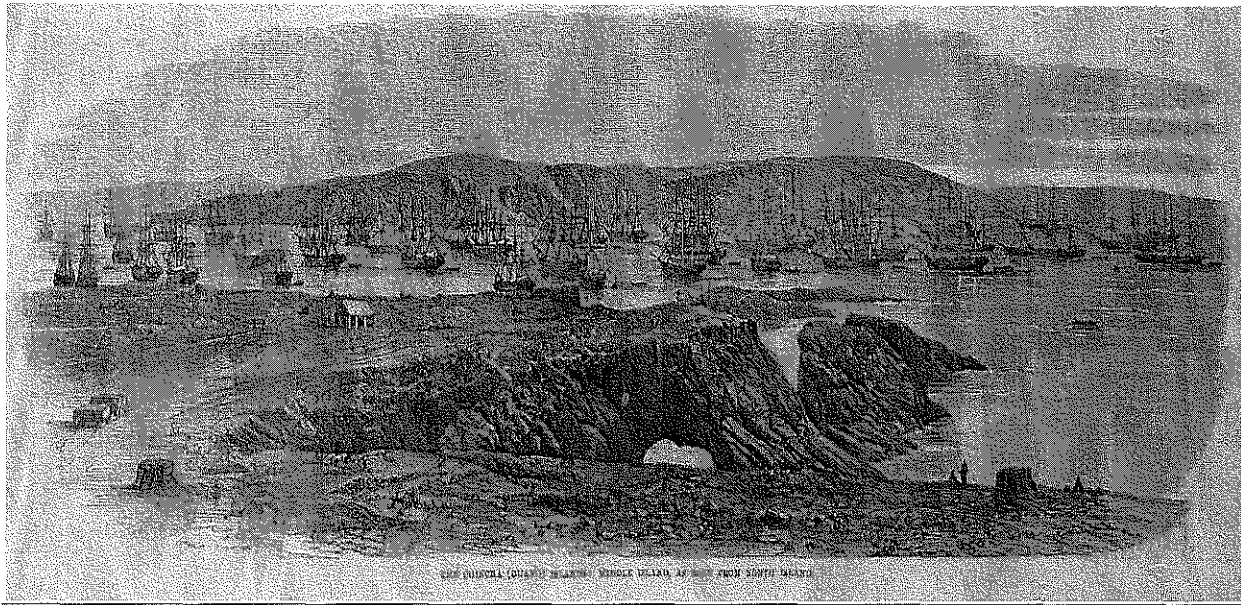
⁵⁴ Hyatt, Dispatches from U.S. consuls in Amoy, June 1st 1856. 3.

⁵⁵ Hyatt, Dispatches from U.S. consuls in Amoy, June 1st 1856. 4.

starvation, sickness and death due to the deplorable conditions on the ship and continued mistreatment by the crew.

They were not adjusted to the long sea voyages or the severe climate changes they encountered during the journey to Peru. This caused many of the coolie laborers to become ill and die while onboard the merchant ships. Once they arrived in Peru they were susceptible to South American diseases to which they had no natural immunity. "A quarantine exists in cases of coolies from China who usually arrive sick and this district during the last three years has become subject to fatal epidemic fevers."⁵⁶ Those that survived the sea voyage and quarantine were either sent inland as agricultural laborers or to the Chincha Islands. The Chincha Islands were rocky outcrops covered with significant quantities of guano and no natural shade. Period drawings of the guano islands provide a clear view of what life would have been like for those that labored on the islands. However, descriptions of working conditions on the islands and the treatment of the coolie laborers presented by the U.S. Consulate, William Miles are drastically different than the reports made by European and Peruvian accounts.

⁵⁶ William Miles, *Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao*, March 31, 1856.



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U.S. Consul William Miles description of the contract process and working conditions paints a very positive and humanitarian view of conditions for coolie laborers both in agriculture and on the Chincha Islands. “The contracts for their service are made in China for eight years. Their wages are \$4 per month paid weekly. They are well fed and clad and appear contented and happy.”⁵⁸ He also states that the relationship between coolie and native laborers was good because they were able to “cooperate with the native laborers as equals.”⁵⁹ However, these descriptions are far different than European and Peruvian accounts presented in Watt Stewarts book *Chinese Bondage in Peru: A History of the Chinese Coolie in Peru, 1849-1874*.

Stewarts quotes a letter from British Minister Thornton which concludes that the “Peruvian natives were hostile and some bloody incidents occurred on the haciendas where Chinese were employed.”⁶⁰ Stewarts also includes a quote from a Peruvian doctor whom had been questioned over the condition of coolie laborers on the guano islands. “Dr. Paz Soldan said

⁵⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chincha_guano_islands.JPG, accessed 3/4/11.

⁵⁸ William Miles, *Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao*, September 30, 1856, 2-3.

⁵⁹ William Miles, *Dispatches from United States consuls in Callao*, September 30, 1856, 2-3.

⁶⁰ Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru: A History of the Chinese Coolie in Peru, 1849-1874*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1951), 19.

he had been assured that those Chinese who were working in the guano beds of the Chincha Islands and in other places were inclined to 'onanismo y pescando resfriado,' because of which they were becoming ill and destroying themselves."⁶¹ He concludes by arguing that "in many cases the coolie laborers were weak and unable to endure the conditions of life and labor to which they were subjected. Furthermore, they were not liked by Peru's laboring class."⁶² The situation they faced with the white U.S. laboring class was in many ways even worse.

Almost as soon as they arrived in the gold mines of the Western United States, Chinese immigrants were the targets of personal violence, including crimes of arson, assault, robbery, burglary, kidnapping, and murder. Chinese miners also faced burdensome licensing fees and taxes which their native born counterparts did not have to pay.⁶³ While the capitalists involved in building the U.S. railroads or working in agriculture welcomed the Chinese laborers with open arms as a replacement for the loss of slave labor, white in the local communities began to turn on the newcomers.

The local white settlers, many of which were also immigrants or children of immigrants, looked with racist fear upon the Chinese immigrants. "Those now here are corrupting the morals and undermining the frame work of our social structure. They are introducing a degraded system of cheap labor, and encouraging and enticing our capitalists, under a false pretext of developing our resources, to discharge competent and honest white men. This system, if continued, will entail upon our people evils far worse than those which resulted from African slavery, which brought such terrible disaster and bloodshed upon the land."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru*, 21.

⁶² Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru*, 23.

⁶³ Richard P. Cole and Gabriel J. Chin, "Emerging from the Margins of Historical Consciousness: Chinese Immigrants and the History of American Law," *Law and History Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), 326.

⁶⁴ H.J. West, *The Chinese Invasion: Revealing the habits, manners and customs of the Chinese, political, social and religious, on the Pacific coast*, (San Francisco; Excelsior office, Bacon & Company, Book & Job Printers, 1873). 5.

However, as a 1873 article from the San Francisco Post noted that “the Chinese Slave trade is actually protected by the police is a matter of common notoriety. Whenever a China steamer gets in, Captain Douglass marches down to the wharf with a squad of policemen, and escorts them to the barracoons off Jackson Street, where they are received by special policemen, and afterward put up at auction. Of course somebody must be paid for this vigilance.”⁶⁵ The article suggests that the police received about half of an import duty which was “exacted from the importer or purchaser of every slave.”⁶⁶ The fact that Chinese employed as miners or in other areas were charged additional taxes suggests that it is quite possible such extra legal taxation could have taken place as local officials tried to capitalize on the coolie trade as well.

The Chinese coolies that were brought to the United States, arrived in response to issues they faced in China and the demand that capitalists had for a cheap labor force required to access the undeveloped resources of the U.S. west. The “broad and sparsely settled continent is a natural resort for their overflowing population. Our high prices of labor, our unoccupied lands, our undeveloped resources, naturally attract them. We need an almost unlimited number of menial laborers. We require mechanics, artisans, and helpers in manufactories. China can supply them.”⁶⁷ However, while the importation of Chinese into the U.S. west helped to fill the demand for cheap labor, once the projects for which they were originally conscripted were complete, they generally did not have the resources to return to China and tended to migrate to urban cities, usually relegated to a specific area of the city. This movement into the local

⁶⁵ “Conduct of The Police,” in *The Chinese Invasion: Revealing the habits, manners and customs of the Chinese, political, social and religious, on the Pacific coast*, by H.J. West, (San Francisco; Excelsior office, Bacon & Company, Book & Job Printers, 1873). 71.

⁶⁶ “Conduct of the Police,” in *The Chinese Invasion*, 71.

⁶⁷ “Chinese Cheap Labor,” in *The Chinese Invasion: Revealing the habits, manners and customs of the Chinese, political, social and religious, on the Pacific coast*, by H.J. West, (San Francisco; Excelsior office, Bacon & Company, Book & Job Printers, 1873). 73.

communities substantially increased tensions between the Chinese and the local white men and women whom began to be replaced by the cheaper Chinese laborers.

Areas of urban labor that had traditionally belonged to women such as “the washing of clothes, and kindred occupations, were the first branches of industry in which the Chinese engaged; but of late years there has been a great increase in the variety of their employments. In the construction of the San Jose Railroad, in 1860, it was discovered that they were cheap and effective road-builders.”⁶⁸ Shortly after they began to compete with white men as well. “The Mission and Pioneer Woolen Mills found that they made first-class factory operatives, and now they are rapidly obtaining employment wherever patient manual labor, without any great amount of brain-work , is requisite.”⁶⁹ The Chinese of California were also “engaged as servants in families, hotels, etc., taking the places of girls in chamberwork and cooking, in which they become very expert. In fact, the Chinese are rapidly monopolizing employment in all the lighter branches of industry usually allotted to women, such as running sewing-machines, making paper bags and boxes, binding shoes, labeling and packing medicines, etc.”⁷⁰

While they began to move into ever more diverse fields, Chinese laborers were still utilized in the general menial labor areas as well. “They are not only grading railways and opening roads (work for which they are now altogether relied on), cutting wood, picking fruit, tending stock, weaving cloth, and running sewing-machines; by acting as firemen on steamers, running stationary engines, painting carriages, upholstering furniture, making boots, shoes,

⁶⁸ Henry George, “The Chinese on the Pacific Coast: Henry George’s letter,” in *The Chinese Invasion: Revealing the habits, manners and customs of the Chinese, political, social and religious, on the Pacific coast*, by H.J. West, (San Francisco; Excelsior office, Bacon & Company, Book & Job Printers, 1873). 26.

⁶⁹ George, “The Chinese on the Pacific Coast,” in *The Chinese Invasion*, 26.

⁷⁰ George, “The Chinese on the Pacific Coast,” in *The Chinese Invasion* , 26.

clothing, cigars, tin and woodenware. The great characteristics of the Chinese, as laborers, are patience and economy—the first makes them efficient laborers, the second cheap laborers.”⁷¹

In a racially tinged effort to restrain the rapidly growing Chinese labor force and suppress their rights, lawmakers began to pass legislation increasing the restrictions and legal standing of Chinese immigrants. Discriminatory lawmaking influenced the way that criminal courts dealt with Chinese suspects and witnesses. In the “1854 California Supreme Court Case of People v. Hall the court excluded the testimony of Chinese witnesses in the prosecution of a white defendant accused of murder. It did so by equating Chinese to Native Americans in a statute that prohibited the latter...from testifying against white persons in criminal proceedings.”⁷² “In its initial stages the movement on the part of the white nations fringing the Pacific to exclude Orientals was of a purely local character. This is shown by the early efforts at state and provincial legislative control of Oriental immigration.”⁷³

By the late 1870’s “the California legislature appealed to the National Government and Pacific Coast members made a vigorous effort for exclusion legislation. In 1879 Congress passed a bill limiting the number of Chinese who could come to the United States in any one vessel to 15, and repealing the favored nation clause in the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, which provided for free immigration between China and the United States, but President Hayes vetoed the measure.”⁷⁴ The passage of anti-Chinese legislation continued on into the early 1880’s and 1890’s with Congressional passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the passage of the Geary Act in 1892.

⁷¹ George, “The Chinese on the Pacific Coast,” 27.

⁷² Cole and Chin, *Emerging from the Margins*, 327.

⁷³ McKenzie, *Oriental Exclusion*, 9.

⁷⁴ McKenzie, *Oriental Exclusion*, 10.

Historians have examined many of the significant issues related to the importation of Chinese coolies into Peru as part of the guano trade or to the United States and the anti-Chinese legislation that followed their arrival. However, most have failed to address the impact of the coolie trade on the coolies and their importance in the social and economic evolution of the American west and Peru. The role of American merchants in importing this new labor force has also largely been overlooked by historians.

Because of their access to Chinese ports, central to the coolie trade and the fast clipper ships operated by American merchants they were able to take a primary position as shippers of Chinese laborers to the U.S. and Peru. The shipping patterns and United States treaties with China, opened multiple Chinese ports to trade with the U.S. This provided American merchants with unprecedented access to a massive collective of cheap labor during a period in which slave labor was being banned in Peru and the U.S.

Within the common American narrative of this period little attention has been paid to the importance of Chinese laborers to both Peru and the United States. Many historians have not examined the coolie trade of the mid to late 1800's by looking at the conditions that imported laborers faced both during their dangerous journey across the Pacific and upon reaching the New World. The climate of Peru and the work on the guano islands posed significant threats to the lives of imported coolies but it also offered an escape from the dire situation that existed in their homeland. The use of contracted ships to import labor from China provided a temporary solution to Peru's labor shortage and offered the coolie laborers certain employment and sustenance.

Those that came voluntarily, largely did so in response to the dire conditions in China which failed to offer any substantial employment or adequate access to food. The coolie labor

contractors that operated in Chinese ports enticed laborers with promises of employment, monetary compensation, adequate provisions, and most importantly, the ability to return to China once their contract had been fulfilled. The unfortunate truth for many Chinese coolies was that once they arrived in Peru or the United States and their contracts were sold, it was unlikely that the new contract owner would honor all of those items provided in the contracts. Without the substantial role that coolies fulfilled, the Peruvian guano trade would have been significantly less profitable and the construction of U.S. railroads would have been nearly impossible to complete with the higher cost minimal labor force that existed in the western U.S.

Initially the Chinese were welcomed with open arms by capitalists that saw coolie laborers as a profitable low cost alternative to white labor. However, as they began to compete with white laborers for employment, the white population began to see the imported Chinese laborers as a threat. The violence and discrimination that followed greatly altered the situation for Chinese immigrants to the United States. The coolies that immigrated to Peru faced similar rejection from the Peruvian laborer's whom also saw them as direct competition in the labor force. While they faced inhumane treatment and the ever present possibility of death in the New World, Chinese immigrants were crucial to the successes of the Peruvian guano trade and the expansion and development of the American west.

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